DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 225 670 PS 013 323

TITLE	Parent Education Programs and Support Services in Edmonton. Summary.
SPONS AGENCY	Alberta Dept. of Education, Edmonton. Planning and Research Branch.
PUB DATE	82
NOTE	24p.; For related document, see PS 013 322.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Access to Education; Delivery Systems; *Educational Methods; *Financial Support; Foreign Countries; *Parent Education; *Participant Characteristics; *Program Content
IDENTIFIERS	*Alberta (Edmonton)

ABSTRACT

Major funders of parent education services in Edmonton, Alberta, requested a study to determine what additional parent education programs/support services were required for the city, and who should be responsible for funding and delivery of these programs/services. While a detailed description of the study's design and results is provided in a separate publication, this report includes the only summary of the study's recommendations and the major support findings upon which these recommendations were established. Related recommendations are categorized together and are listed in the order of priority within each category. These categories are: support services, parent (target) groups, program/service content, educational approaches, accessibility and attractiveness, and jurisdiction and funding. (MP)

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PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT SERVICES IN EDMONTON

SUMMARY

PS 013323

A study funded by the Planning and Research Branch of Alberta Education and prepared by the Edmonton Social Planning Council

Fall, 1982

82-18

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SUMMARY

Major funders of parent education services in Edmonton requested a study to determine what additional parent education programs or support services were required for the city, and who should be responsible for ensuring that the required additional programs and support services were provided and funded. The required types of parent education services were identified by:

a) reviewing the literature pertaining to the relative benefits of various types of parent education serviees,

b) examining the existing parent education services offered by 61 Edmonton agencies, and

c) analyzing opinions of interested parties obtained through:

  i) questionnaires and/or interviews with 38 parent education agencies,
  ii) interviews with 78 professionals working with families, and
  iii) questionnaires completed by 433 parents who received the questionnaires from schools, kindergartens, day care centres, parent groups, social service agencies, or health clinics. The response rate was approximately 70%.

Following are the recommendations concerning the types of parent education services required in Edmonton, and the supporting findings of the study. Related recommendations are categorized together and are listed in the order of priority within each category.

A. Support Services

Recommendation A.1a: *A parent education resource centre should be developed to provide support services for parents and parent educators; the services should include:*

- *provision of educational resources and a central source of information*
- *facilitative mechanism for the co-ordination of educational efforts*
- *program development and evaluation*
- *consultative services for all parent educators*
- *training of lay or professional leaders for parent education programs*
- *leadership in the promotion of parent education*

Recommendation A.1b: *Further investigations should be undertaken to determine the best model of a parent education resource centre, including the most beneficial delivery agent and geographic service area.*

1. The above functions have, for the most part, not been the responsibility of any organization since the closing of the Parent Resource Unit. However, some responsibilities of the Unit have been transferred to Alberta Education (Early Childhood Services), Alberta Agriculture, and various branches of Alberta Social Services and Community Health. (p.p. 56 - 59, 101 - 103 main report.)

2. The lack of a resource centre and the consequent reduction in centralized support services will very likely have a negative impact on parent education services in Edmonton and in the Province.
   a) The absence of a 'clearing house' will increase duplication of efforts.
   b) Co-ordination of efforts will likely decrease.
   c) The traditional prepackaged, very structured programs geared to the literate, motivated "middle class" parent is likely to predominate if personnel are not made available for program development and the training of persons to implement programs designed to meet the special needs of parents. (p. 126, main report.)

d) The contribution of the voluntary sector is likely to decrease if the necessary training, consultation and resources are not available for them. Also, according to agencies and professionals in this survey, the training of para-professionals (experienced parents) as group leaders is vital in enhancing the quality of parent education. (p. 93, main report.)

e) Parent education will be less attractive for parents if it is not promoted as an educational service appropriate for all parents. According to agencies and professionals, a promotional campaign is of primary importance in Edmonton. (p. 90, main report.)

3. The majority of parent educators in the survey indicated there was a need to increase support services available for them. The most concern was expressed by parent associations. (p.p. 95 - 96, main report.)

4. It was generally felt by parent educators that a centralized resource centre available to all individuals and organizations would be the most appropriate delivery agent (p. 120, main report), though they did not specify who should operate the centre.

5. Although the study focused on Edmonton, it became evident that a resource centre serving a larger area than Edmonton may be beneficial. This requires further study.

B. Parent (Target) Groups

Recommendation B.1: *Additional parent education services should be provided for parents prone to child abuse/neglect.*

1. Parent education agencies and professionals chose parents prone to child abuse/neglect as the first priority group in need of additional services. (p.p. 66 - 69, main report.)

2. Two of the four programs available for parents prone to child abuse/ neglect were filled to capacity in 1981/82. Also, there were no support groups, such as Parents Anonymous, for this group of parents. (p.p. 45, 50, 54, main report.)

3. The literature suggests that child abuse and neglect is closely related to parents' inadequate knowledge and skills rather than a psychological disturbance. Consequently the Canadian Standing Senate Committee, directed to study the 'child at risk', recommended that courses in parenting be promoted by all concerned with the welfare of children in Canada. (p.p. 9 - 10, main report.)

Recommendation B.2: *Additional parent education should be provided for young single parents, particularly teenage parents.*

1. Agencies and professionals chose teenage parents as the second priority target group, and single parents as the third priority. Those who chose single parents as a priority tended to express most concern for young, single, low income mothers. (p.p. 68 - 69, main report.)

2. A substantial number (13%) of parents in Edmonton are single parents, and a significant proportion of them are teenage parents. Of the single Alberta mothers who gave birth in 1979, one-quarter were under nineteen. (p. 11, main report.)

3. There are no obvious gaps in services to mature single parents. Nearly a quarter of Edmonton's programs in 1981/82 covered the topic of single parenting. Also, 15% of Edmonton's programs were primarily attended by single parents. None of these programs had a waiting list. In addition, there were two self-help groups

available for single parents. (p.p. 44 - 45, 50, 55, main report.)

4. There are obvious gaps in services to teenage parents. They tend not to participate in parent groups and programs with more mature parents. Two of the six programs for single teenage mothers were filled to capacity in 1981/82. No self help groups were available for teenage parents. (p.p. 44, 45, 50, 55, main report.)
5. Extensive parent education services should be available for very young parents. They tend to be first time parents with infants who, according to the literature, express a desire for information/ advice more than any other parents. (p. 13, main report.)

Recommendation B.3: *Additional parent education should be provided for parents with teenagers.*

1. Parents with teenage children were the fourth priority of agencies. Although this group was a lower priority for professionals, half the professionals surveyed thought it was essential to develop additional services for this group. (p. 69, main report.)
2. Fifty-five percent of the parents in the survey wanted to learn a lot more about 'being a better parent to teenagers'. This was one of the most popular topics rated by parents. (p. 76, main report.)
3. A number of studies indicate that parents tend to seek the most advice and information when their children are very young, and again when their children become teenagers. (p. 13, main report.)
4. Only four programs were available for parents of teens in 1981/82, in comparison to twenty-seven available for parents of preschoolers. One of the programs was filled to capacity and the two parent self-help groups reported a high attendance rate. (p.p. 44 - 45,

50, 55, main report.)

Recommendation B.4: *Further investigations should be undertaken to determine if there are adequate parent education services for parents of handicapped children.*

1. There was no consensus amongst professionals and agencies as to whether additional parent education services were required for parents of handicapped children. A majority of respondents believed it was not essential to develop additional services, but others (particularly parent associations) claimed it should be the top priority. (p. 69, main report.)
2. Nine different associations are providing educational support services for parents with exceptional children. Four of the eight programs available were filled to capacity last year but there are plans to expand and develop additional programs. It is uncertain whether the planned services will meet the demand. (p.p. 50 - 55, main report.)

Recommendation B.5: *Parent education agencies should take measures to increase the attractiveness and accessibility of their services for fathers.*

1. There was a low participation of fathers in all programs in 1981/82.
2. A significant proportion of programs and parent support groups are designed for mothers only; but few steps have been taken to address the special needs of fathers. There are no fathers' support groups or programs which accommodate teenage fathers (p. 44, main report.)
3. Only half of the parent education programs were offered in the day and were inaccessible to most employed fathers. Several respondents suggested it would be convenient for employed parents to

participate in parent education programs which were available during the noon hours and close to the workplace. Last year, only one program used this method of delivery. (p. 49, main report.)

4. Parent education programs elsewhere in Canada and in other countries have also reported a low participation rate of fathers. Although this is a concern expressed in the literature, research has not been directed to examining means by which to increase the participation of fathers. (p. 13, main report.)

Recommendation B.6: *Educational services for parents of newborns should be continued.*

1. Previous research has shown that expectant parents and parents with newborns tend to seek information/advice more than any other parents. (p. 13, main report.)
2. The two associations providing prenatal/post-partum classes and group discussions in Edmonton were filled to capacity last year; at the same time the Local Board of Health is considering the elimination of its post-partum class which was attended by approximately 800 parents in Edmonton last year. (p.p. 50 - 52, main report.)

C. Content

Recommendation C.1: *Parent education services should continue to focus on the topics related to the social-emotional well being of children (communications, building child's self-esteem, getting along with others), child growth and development, and the parent as a person (dealing with stress, frustrations); with greatest emphasis on the first topic.*

1. Professionals, parent education agencies, and parents rated these topics as the top priorities. Topics related to the social-

emotional well being of children were rated as the most important. (p.p. 72 - 75, main report.)

2. The topics of interest to parents in this survey were similar to findings in other surveys, although some studies have found a greater parent interest in discipline. (p. 16, main report.)
3. The majority of programs in Edmonton in 1981/82 covered the topics related to the social-emotional well being of children and the 'stresses of being a parent'; as well as discipline. Child growth and development was not as common a topic, but it was covered by 40% of the programs. Thus the topics of interest to most parents appear to be well covered. (p.p. 45 - 47, main report.)

Recommendation C.2: *More parent education services should cover the topic of 'how to help children learn and cope in school'.*

1. This was the fourth most important concern of parents; 60% wanted to learn a lot more about helping their children in school. (p. 75, main report.)
2. Approximately 10% of the programs dealt with this topic, but it was not a major focus of any programs. Only one conference covered the topic of parent involvement in school. (p.p. 45 - 47, 53, main report.)

Recommendation C.3: *More parent education should cover the topic of 'how to know if something is physically or mentally wrong with children'.*

1. This was the fifth most popular topic of parents; nearly 60% wanted to know a lot more about detecting physical or mental problems of their children. (p. 76, main report.)
2. Only 13% of the programs covered this topic. (p.p. 45-47, main report.)

Recommendation C.4: *More parent education should cover the topic of 'how to deal with children and talk to children about drugs'.*

1. This was the sixth most popular topic of parents; 56% wanted to learn a lot more about drugs and their children. (p. 76, main report.)
2. Only 7% of the programs covered this topic. (p.p. 45 - 47, main report.)

Recommendation C.5: *More parent education should cover the topic of 'how to help children deal with divorce and remarriage'.*

1. Professionals and parent education agencies rated this as the fourth most important topic for additional parent education to cover. Divorce and remarriage were not of major interest to most parents in the survey, but 27% of the parents did express a desire to learn a lot more about this area. (Twenty-five percent of all the parents surveyed were single parents.) (p. 75, main report.)
2. Just 14% of the programs in 1981/82 covered the topic of divorce, and fewer still (6%) dealt with remarriage. (p. 47, main report.)
3. A demand definately exists for information on parenting issues related to divorce. An information (lecture) series covering this topic last year attracted 255 parents. Perhaps a similar series should cover parenting issues related to remarriage.

D. Educational Approaches

Recommendation D.1a: *A wide variety of educational approaches should continue to be made available for parents wishing to learn more about parenting including:*

a) *group approaches (programs using presentations and discussions. self help parent discussion groups, programs using modelling/ observation and discussion, lectures, conferences)*
b) *mass media approaches (TV, libraries, mailed material, brochures)*
c) *individual approaches (individual instruction, home visitors).*

Recommendation D.1b: *Home visits should primarily be used only to complement other educational approaches.*

1. The majority of parent education agencies, professionals and parents thought all approaches were important. (p.p. 78 - 87, main report.)
2. Adult learning principles suggest there should be a variety of educational approaches to accommodate individual learning styles. (p. 24, main report.)
3. Evaluation research has not yielded any conclusive evidence as to the relative effectiveness of the various educational approaches, however the home visitor method, unlike all other methods, has shown to be detrimental in some cases. (p.p. 19 - 23, main report.) It was also the least preferred approach of parents in this survey and the parents in the extensive survey done by others (p. 26, main report.) Nevertheless, some parents (19%) in this survey indicated they would very much like to have home visits. Many who favoured this approach were clients of social service agencies. p.p. 78 - 79, main report.)
4. Parent education agencies and professionals stressed the importance of home visits as a means to assess the home situation and to reach out to parents reluctant to seek parent education. (p. 84, main report.)

Recommendation D.2a: *Parent education agencies should continue to implement programs using presentation and discussions, and continue to provide support to parent self-help discussion groups.*

Recommendation D.2b: *Self-help discussion groups should be initiated and supported for parents prone to child abuse/neglect and teenage parents.*

1. Professionals and agencies tended to recommend these approaches as the top priorities for additional parent education. A course using presentations/discussions was the most preferred approach of parents, and a parent discussion group was the fourth most preferred approach. (p.p. 78 - 81, main report.)
2. These approaches allow parents to learn from one another, to gain support from each other, and to plan their own learning activities. The group leader acts mainly as a facilitator rather than an instructor. This is an effective educational method according to adult learning principles, and evaluations of parent education programs. (p.p. 19, 26, main report.)
3. Over three quarters of parent education programs in Edmonton 1981/82 used group discussion and presentations; thus this approach is readily available for parents. (p.p. 47 - 48, main report.)
4. There were at least 24 parent discussion groups which were organized mainly for parents with special needs/interests - parents with 'problem teens', single parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, parents with exceptional children, parents of twins/triplets, and expectant parents. Parents prone to child abuse/neglect and teenage parents were the only identified types of parents with special needs who did not have a self-help group to

join if they wished. (p.p. 54 - 55, main report.)

Recommendation D.3: *More lectures and conferences should be made available for parents who wish to obtain more knowledge and information about parenting.*

1. Lectures and conferences were some of the least preferred approaches of professionals and agencies, primarily because they believed these approaches would neither reach or be beneficial to the parents who they perceived as needing parent education the most (i.e. parents prone to child abuse/neglect, and isolated single parents). However, lectures and conferences were among the most preferred approaches of parents. (p.p. 78 - 81, main report.)
2. Lectures and conferences may be more accessible and attractive to parents because they require a limited time commitment. Notably, approximately 40% of the parents did not want to spend more than four hours on parent education in the next six months. (p. 98, main report.)
3. Very few lectures or conferences were available for parents who were not members of a parent group or association (p.p. 53 - 55, main report.)

Recommendation D.4: *Parent education programs should use some modelling techniques when the objective of the learner is to acquire parenting skills; particularly parenting skills with young children and handicapped children.*

1. Modelling was generally viewed by professionals and agencies as one of the most effective approaches which should be used more often. A majority of parents liked this approach. (p.p. 82 - 84, main report.)

2. Research has shown that modelling is an effective method of teaching parenting skills to parents of preschoolers and handicapped children. (p.p. 15 - 20, main report.)

3. Only 15% of the programs in Edmonton, 1981/82, used this technique. (p.p. 47 - 48, main report.)

Recommendation D.5: *Parent education reading material should continue to be made available to parents via libraries, bookstores, and distribution of newsletters, magazines and brochures.*

1. Libraries and mailed material were some of the least preferred approaches of parent education agencies and professionals. However, these approaches were liked by the majority of parents. Slightly more parents liked the group approaches. (p. 86, main report.)

2. In contrast, other research has shown that parents in general prefer reading more than joining discussion groups. (p. 25, main report.)

3. Over 56% of the parents in this survey had used a library or bookstore as a source of information/advice on parenting. In comparison, 41% had used courses/discussion groups. Only friends, family, and physicians had been more frequently used as sources of information. (p. 92. main report.)

Recommendation D.6a: *Television should be used to promote parent education, to inform parents of available resources, and to motivate parents to learn more about parenting.*

Recommendation D.6b: *Further evaluations of parent education television programs should be undertaken.*

1. Parents in general liked a TV series on parenting slightly less than most other approaches. Television was highly recommended by agencies and professionals as a means of reaching a large number of parents

who might not actively seek parent education; but it was generally viewed as an ineffective teaching tool. (p.p. 81-82, main report.)

2. Previous research indicated that dramatizations on TV were very effective in reaching a large proportion of the population, particularly when shown at prime viewing time. But the TV series was only considered to be an effective teaching tool when combined with discussion groups. It would be valuable to develop and evaluate a similar TV program in Edmonton. (p. 22, main report.)
3. Alberta Access presently offers day-time series on parenting, which are accompanied by exercises and workbooks. These should be evaluated in terms of who they are reaching and their effectiveness.

E. Accessibility and Attractiveness

Recommendation E.1: *The accessibility and attractiveness of parent education should be improved by:*

a) *advertising and promoting parent education (also see recommendation A.1 and recommendation D.6a)*
b) *offering services within local communities, local facilities, and as much as possible through existing agencies and groups in contact with parents - clinics, daycare centres, community groups, mother's groups, and most of all, schools*
c) *providing child care*
d) *developing programs specifically for abusive/negligent parents, and teenage parents (also see recommendation B.1 and B.2)*
e) *maintaining minimal fees for all parent education services*
f) *ensuring adequate training of para-professionals (experienced parents) to be parent educators/group facilitators (also see recommendation A.1)*
g) *developing more parent education services in districts which have few services (for example the Beverly district)*

1. These were the most common recommendations made by parents, professionals, and/or parent education agencies when asked how parent education could be made more accessible and attractive in Edmonton. (p.p. 87 - 94, main report.)

F. Jurisdiction and Funding

It is important to appreciate that the above recommendations do not constitute a master plan for parent education in Edmonton, but rather servce as a guide to those who have parent education within their jurisdiction. Clearly there are too many independent organizations responsible for either funding, initiating, or delivering parent education services for the implementation of an overall plan to be realistic.

The recommendations concerning the educational approaches, and means of increasing the accessibility and attractiveness of services are relevant to all organizations responsible for parent education services. Also, the implementation of these recommendations may not require additional funds. The other recommendations require someone to take the initiative to ensure their implementation and to provide the necessary funds.

The most appropriate organizations to undertake responsibility for each recommendation were chosen using three criteria:

a) the extent to which the recommended parent education service falls within the jurisdiction of the potential funders,
b) the degree to which previous funding patterns can be maintained, and

c) the opinions of parent education agencies and professionals about who should be delivering and funding parent education.

Recommendation F.1: *The major stakeholders in parent education - Alberta Social Services and Community Health, Alberta Education, and the Further Education Branch of Advanced Education and Manpower, should take responsibility for ensuring the provision of a parent education resource centre to offer educational support services for parents and parent educators.*

1. A resource centre would be of benefit to all organizations responsible for the provision of parent education services; thus it is appropriate that a resource centre be the joint responsibility of all major stakeholders. (p.p. 103 - 113, main report.)
2. To some extent, support services for parent educators are presently funded by various branches of Alberta Social Services and Community Health (including FCSS), and the Early Childhood Services branch of Alberta Education. Also, Further Education policies allow for the subsidization of training courses for volunteer parent educators/group leaders. (p.p. 101 - 103, main report.)

Recommendation F.2: *The Child Welfare Branch should take responsibility for ensuring the provision of additional parent education for parents prone to child abuse or neglect.*

1. The Child Welfare Branch is mandated to provide services to families "for the purpose of supporting and maintaining the family unit and avoiding conditions that would necessitate the removal of a child or children from the home" (Child Welfare Programs, 1981). Family and Community Support Services, and the Local Board of Health are also responsible for providing educational services of a preventative nature, but they are not as clearly responsible for parents who

are prone to child abuse or neglect. Further Education is not an appropriate major funder because it will only subsidize a small proportion of the actual costs of parent education programs, and will not provide funds for support groups. (p.p. 107-110, main report.)

2. In 1981/82, three programs for parents prone to child abuse or neglect were directly funded by Alberta Social Services and Community Health (mainly the Child Welfare Branch). One program was offered by an FCSS agency and indirectly subsidized by the Child Welfare Branch; the Branch paid the fees of clients attending the program (p.p. 113 - 116, main report.)

Recommendation F.3: *The Local Board of Health, United Way, Family and Community Support Services (local), Alberta Social Services and Community Health, and Alberta Education should take responsibility for ensuring the provision of additional parent education for teenage parents.*

1. More than any other organization, the Local Board of Health has taken the responsibility for providing parent education at the prenatal and infant stages; and most teenage parents are either expecting a child or have an infant. However, given the personal development needs of teenage parents, parent education programs may require going beyond health, safety and infant care topics, thus expertise in other areas may be necessary. Social service agencies have the expertise. United Way and FCSS (local) have the mandate to fund agencies providing parent education for teenage parents, and ASSCH has the responsibility to provide counselling and assistance to unmarried expectant mothers. More than any other organization,

Alberta Education is responsible for the education of teenagers, but is only responsible for those who attend school. (p.p. 103 - 113, main report.)

2. Woodside Home, which is operated by ASSCH, offers parent education to single teenage mothers, but mainly to expectant mothers. All teenage parents have access to Terra's parent education services funded by the United Way. The only other program for teenage parents in 1981/82 was the temporary Teen Mothers Program operated by Project Runaway, in co-operation with the Local Board of Health. This program was funded by a Canada Employment and Immigration grant. If the evaluation of the project is positive, the Local Board of Health ought to continue its involvement with the program and if necessary, obtain assistance from ASSCH or FCSS. (p.p. 113 - 116, main report.)

Recommendation F.4: *Family and Community Support Services (local) and the School Boards should ensure the provision of additional parent education for parents of teens.*

1. FCSS is mandated to provide parent education services which do not duplicate the services of other government and private agencies. Last year, most parent education programs for parents of teens were funded by FCSS; thus FCSS would not be duplicating the services of others if it provided additional education for parents of teens. (p.p. 109 - 110, 113, main report.)

2. Professionals and agencies highly recommended that schools become more involved in parent education. It would be appropriate for the Continuing Education branch of the School Boards to sponsor programs

for parents of teens within the school system. (p.p. 116 - 122, 126, main report.)

Recommendation F.5: *Alberta Social Services and Community Health should provide the funds required to investigate the adequacy of parent education for parents with handicapped children.*

1. ASSCH has primary responsibility for providing support services to families with handicapped children.
2. ASSCH and United Way have been the primary funders of agencies providing services for handicapped children. (p.p. 113, 115, main report.)

Recommendation F.6: *Alberta Education should ensure the provision of additional parent education services covering the topic, 'how to help children learn and cope in school'.*

1. Alberta Education has the responsibility of educating children. Because a child's home environment greatly influences his or her learning ability, parents need information on how they can enhance the intellectual development of their children, and how they can increase their child's satisfaction and performance in the school setting. (p.p. 103 - 104, main report.)
2. In 1981/82, several programs covered the topic 'how to help children learn in school', but only briefly. (p. 47, main report.) Helping children in school implies a parent-teacher partnership which can best be addressed within the school system.

Recommendation F.7: *The Local Board of Health should take primary responsibility for ensuring the provision of additional parent education covering the topic 'how to know if there is something physically or mentally wrong with children'.*

1. Health education is a primary responsibility of the Local Board of Health. (p. 109, main report.)

2. Although this topic was not the major focus of any parent education programs in Edmonton last year, several programs covered the topic, and were funded by the Local Board of Health, FCSS, Further Education, Alberta Access, and Alberta Social Services and Community Health. The Local Board of Health played the largest role in this area.

Recommendation F.8: *The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission should ensure the provision of additional parent education covering the topic of drugs.*

1. AADAC has primary responsibility for education directed to drug abuse prevention.

2. A number of private agencies, FCSS agencies, and parent groups have sponsored lectures and programs which have incorporated the topic of drugs and children. AADAC was a major source of resource people and material. (p.p. 46, 113, main report.)

Recommendation F.9: *Family and Community Support Services (local) and the United Way should ensure the provision of additional parent education covering the topic 'how to help children deal with divorce/ remarriage'.*

1. This is the area of expertise, and the responsibility, of family life education and family counselling agencies. FCSS and United Way have been the major funders of these agencies. (Appendix B, main report.)

2. Last year, parent education agencies covering these topics were funded by FCSS, United Way, Alberta Access, ASSCH, private organizations, and Further Education. FCSS was the primary funder.

Recommendation F.10: *An ongoing mechanism should be established whereby all major funders jointly review and decide who will assume responsibility for needed parent education services which are not clearly the responsibility of any one funder.*

1. Parent education falls within the jurisdiction of numerous organizations, yet most parent education services are not clearly the responsibility of any one organization. Consequently, initiators of parent education projects are often referred from one potential funder to another, and the decision regarding who will fund the services is frequently either delayed or never made. A solution might be to establish a body of representatives who have decision-making power within the major funding organizations. The function of this body would be to decide who would fund the required services.